Tells the Facts and Names the Names

$2.50

CounterPunch

July 16-31 2001 *Alexander Cockburn and Jeffrey St. Clair* VOL. 8, NO. 14

In This Issue

THE TRUTH ABOUT POLYGRAPHS

- The Polygraph was Invented in 1915 by a Harvard Man called William Moulton Marston, Whose Main Claim to Fame Derives From Inventing the Cartoon Character, Wonder Woman.

JAMES WATT'S SCIONS

- It Looks Like Gale Norton is Quietly Stacking the Backrooms of the Interior Department with a Full Roster of Reagan Retreads.

CONSUELA ON RAP

- "Rap? They Call It Music, But If Anything It's Poetry, and Dance. No Melody. Singing is Part of Our Legacy...Since Rap Came in the Late 70s I'm Finding Our Children Aren't Singing."

A Journey Through Snow Hill, Alabama

Consuela's Return

BY ALEXANDER COCKBURN

Not for the first time, Wilbur and his wife prayed for me. Nor did they omit entreaties to the Lord for my financial good fortune as well as health and safety in my drive from Landrum S.C. back to California. An hour later, the '62 Plymouth station wagon performing most satisfactorily, I was into Georgia on Interstate 85 and two hours after that into Alabama and passing to the north of Tuskegee where, on the first day of 1889, a shy young black man called William James Edwards completed his three-day, 90 mile walk from Snow Hill to enlist in Booker T. Washington's Normal and Industrial Tuskegee Institute. He walked with a limp, the souvenir of scrofula, that had seen him only able to crawl as a boy, enduring without anaesthetic Dr Keyser's periodic though ultimately successful assaults with a knife on the infected bone tissue on his heel and elbow.

Three years later the young man who'd never seen a knife and fork, who'd slept all his life on the dirt floor of a one-room shack, graduated second in his class. He was confident and determined to return to Snow Hill and open an Institute on the Booker T. Washington model. There were more than 400,000 black people in Alabama's Black Belt in 1870, freed from slavery and mostly facing the new oppression of sharecropping, which seasoned nominal freedom with grinding toil and constant indebtedness, the lynch mob ready to chasten any impertinence with whip or noose.

Ahead of his time, Edwards reckoned one of the big problems of southern agriculture was the destruction of the top soil by greed and ignorance. "These waste places," he write in his 1918 memoir Twenty-Five Years in the Black Belt "can be rclaimed and the gutted hills made to blossom, only by giving the Negro a common education, combined with religious, moral and industrial training and the opportunity to at least own his home, if not the land he cultivates. The Negro must be taught to believe that the farmer can become prosperous and independent; that he can own his home and educate his children in the country. If he can, and he can be taught these things, in less than ten years, every available farm in the rural South will be occupied."

Edwards started the Snow Hill Institute in the mid-1890s in a one-room cabin with one teacher, three students and 50 cents in capital. By 1918 the school boasted 24 buildings, between 300 and 400 students learning fourteen trades, assets including 1,940 acres of land valued at $125,000 and deeded to a board of trustees. Dignified and fervent, Edwards was a wonderful fundraiser among northern whites, as Booker T. Washington gratefully appreciated. He raised many thousands for Tuskegee and Snow Hill. Anna Jeanes, a Philadelphia heiress, listened to him for an evening and sent Snow Hill a cheque for $5,000.Other benefactions followed. Andrew Carnegie doubled that sum in an initial donation to Tuskegee and sent much more later. Snow Hill waxed in reputation and achievement. Among the Institute's graduates was Arthur W. Mitchell, the first black rep-

(**Snow Hill** *continued on page 5*)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Our Little Secrets

Lie Detector Lies

We're no fans of the man from Modesto, Gary Condit. But it was troubling to see him being hounded by the cable news shows into taking a polygraph test, and then trashed for using his own polygrapher. Even J. Edgar Hoover knew that the polygraph wasn't any good for detecting deception. He dropped the test for analysis of his own men—but used it to coerce confessions out of civilian suspects.

The polygraph was invented in 1915 by a Harvard man called William Moulton Marston, who claimed that his clunky little gizmo could detect lies by measuring blood pressure. Marston's main claim to fame derives not from his machine, but from a doodle he came up with: the cartoon character Wonder Woman.

In the past 85 years, the polygraph hasn't changed much from the Marston prototype. The secret of the polygraph is that their machine is no more capable of telling the truth than were the priests of ancient Rome standing knee-deep in chicken parts," says Alan Zelicoff, a physician and senior scientist at the Center for National Security and Arms Control at the Sandia Labs in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Zelicoff gave us this view in an article in the July-August edition of The Skeptical Inquirer.

Zelicoff writes that the polygraph administer is a kind of confidence artist or modern day mesmerist who tries to seduce (or scare) his subjects into believing in the power of the machine to catch them in the most minute inconsistency. "The subject, nervously strapped in a chair, is often convinced by the aura surrounding this cheap parlor trick, and is then putty in the hands of the polygrapher, who then launches into an intrusive, illegal and wide-ranging inquisition," Zelicoff writes. "The subject is told from time to time that the machine is indicating deception. It isn't, of course. And he is continuously urged to clarify his answers, by providing more and more personal information." At an arbitrary point, the polygrapher calls off the testing, consults the spools of graph paper and makes an entirely subjective rendering on whether the subject has given a "deceptive response".

Connoisseurs of the Wen Ho Lee affair will remember that at one point the FBI falsely told the Taiwanese nuclear physicist (accused on spying for the Chinese in Los Alamos) that polygraph tests showed he was lying. Cops play these sorts of tricks all the time, faking forensic reports and then shoving them under the noses of their suspects, shouting that they're proven liars and that they'd best sign a confession right away.

The most comprehensive review of the polygraph was conducted in 1983 by the Office of Technology Assessment, a research branch of congress. The OTA concluded, "There is no known physiological response that is unique to deception." The report did note that the CIA and its companions "believe that the polygraph is a useful screening tool."

There are numerous ghastly stories of federal employees abused by the machine and its operators. A few years ago FBI agent Mark Mallah was given a routine polygraph. The polygrapher, who had only 80 hours experience with the machine, concluded that Mallah had lied. (Zelicoff notes that even barbers must have 1,000 hours of training before getting a license to cut hair.) His life soon transformed into a Kafka story. He was stripped of his badge, subjected to midnight searches of his house, his diary and appointment book seized and scrutinized his neighbors, friends and relatives interrogated his every move outside monitored by helicopters. In the end, Mallah's life was pretty much destroyed, but nothing was ever proved against him. The FBI finally apologized and Congress outlawed the use of the polygraph for civilian employees in 1988.

It's worth noting that the Walker brothers and Aldrich Ames both beat the polygraph with no sweat. Kim Philby settled himself with a dollop of Valium before breezing through his polygraph exams.

One investigator (and CounterPuncher) for a defense lawyer in California's Bay Are tells us that while the polygraph isn't admissible in most courts it's used all the time by prosecutors, mostly to seal plea bargains. "It's a perilous option, because the utility of the polygraph is almost totally up to the operator. There are good polygraphers, but many who work for the district attorneys have only minimal training."

The investigator described a recent case where a defense witness in a homicide case, who had passed a polygraph given by a former FBI polygrapher with 20 years experience, was sent to the DA for another test given by their examiner, a relative novice with the device. Defense lawyers can't be in the room while the test is given, even when their clients are being examined. The prosecutors videotape the session, and while the results of the polygraph can't be used at trial, the videotape can become evidence. In this case, the defense lawyer waited in the hall until the witness emerged from the room "with his face red as a beet." The lawyer heard the DA's investigator threaten the witness: "You little slimebag, I know your lying. We're going to revoke your parole." The DA's examiner had interpreted the readings from one of his answers as being "deceptive".

Bush League

In a radio interview on July 26, former big league manager Kevin Kennedy, described his final job interview for the Texas Rangers managerial position. The first question came from team president George W. Bush. "Kevin, can a team have too many Latin players on it to win a championship?" At the time the Texas Rangers roster included Ivan "Pudge", Juan Gonzalez, Rueben Sierra, and Julio

Editors
Alexander Cockburn
Jeffrey St. Clair

Business Manager
Becky Grant

Design
Deborah Thomas

Counselor
Ben Sonnenberg

Published twice monthly except August, 22 issues a year:
$40 individuals,
$100 institutions/supporters
$30 student/low-income
CounterPunch.
All rights reserved.
CounterPunch
3220 N. St., NW, PMB 346
Washington, DC, 20007-2829
1-800-840-3683 (phone)
1-800-967-3620 (fax)
www.counterpunch.org

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The decisive factor in China getting the Olympic Games in 2008 was money and a relentless lobbying campaign by Nike, Coca-Cola, GE and more than a dozen other corporations.

Franco—arguably four of the best players in the American League at the time. Kennedy said he thought that Bush believed that the number of Latin players on the team created a "clubhouse" problem. It's also possible that Bush thought perhaps a team stocked with talented Latinos might not draw as well as a team larded with mediocre American-bred boys. Baseball connoisseurs will recall that Bush's biggest move as team president was to trade away Sammy Sosa, the great slugger from the Dominican Republic, for a washed up Harold Baines. Needlesstosay, the move didn't improve team chemistry or wins.

KA-CHING

Mel Lastman, the mayor of Toronto, is being blamed for costing the city the 2008 Summer Olympic Games, eventually awarded to Peking, despite protests from Switzerland over the Chinese's apparent practice of breeding the Swiss national dog as meat for Moo Shu Bernard and other delicacies. A few weeks before the International Olympic Committee made its decision Lastman made a racist outburst about the African delegation, saying that he feared going to a meeting in Africa because he "might be boiled alive and eaten".

It makes sense that the forever put-upon Canadians might feel victimized by yet another double standard. Similar slurs uttered by a US senator didn't stop Utah, hardly an enclave of racial sensitivity, from garnering the 2002 winter games. Our friend Kevin Gray, a civil rights organizer in South Carolina, reminds us that a few years ago that state's junior senator, Ernest "Fritz" Hollings, denounced African leaders as "potentates who boil you and eat you".

Actually, racism had almost nothing to do with China getting the Olympics. The decisive factor was money and a relentless lobbying campaign by Nike, Coca-Cola, GE and more than a dozen other corporations, including oddly enough, Acer, Taiwan's top computer maker, who stand to make a killing from the games. The Peking Olympics are expected to generate $1.63 billion in contracts and sales. According to Fred Hu, an analyst at Goldman Sachs, the spending spree will boost China's GDP by 0.3 percent per year from 2002 to 2008.

THE GANG'S ALL HERE

It looks like Gale Norton is quietly stacking the backrooms of the Interior Department with a full roster of Reagan retreads. The latest recruit is Jason Peltier, who has been named as a special assistant to oversee the Bureau of Reclamation. So now we have Norton, Bureau of Reclamation director John Keys, and Peltier.

During the Reagan years, Peltier came over to Interior from the Hill as a political appointee. He was raised by his uncle in California, one of the big growers in the central valley, the biggest water vampire in the West. At Interior, Peltier returned to California with Dave Houston, when Houston became Regional Director for the Bureau of Reclamation out there. After Houston left the government, he went on to make millions, apparently, selling bonds for the water users—capital improvements, that sort of thing—through Merrill Lynch. Pointing to his Rolodex, he once bragged that the water user phone numbers in it represented a seven figure income for him.

Peltier traded in his experience as a federal water bureaucrat by becoming the head of the California Water Users Association, a group that's never seen a dam it didn't love or a fish it cared for. That job should disqualify him at Interior, since now he will be regulating these very same people. His wife had already taken a political appointee job at EPA. Of course, as it stands he'll still most likely be lobbying for the CWUA, but we'll be paying his salary.

The real money in water these days comes courtesy of a $1.2 billion federal giveaway program created under the Small Reclamation Projects Act, which creates small dams across the west and gives the water away to corporate ag interests at pennies on the dollar. The mastermind of that program was James Ziglar, at that time Assistant Secretary for Water and Science during Bush I.

Ziglar has been well-taken care of by his Republican compatriots. Since 1998 he has served as sergeant of arms in the senate, where he helped direct the impeachment trial of Clinton. Yes, he lost his job when Jeffords defected and swung the perks to Daschle and Company. But Ziglar won't be stranded long. He's been tapped by Bush to become the new commissioner of the Immigration and Naturalization Service. He is perfect fit for the Bush team.

Peltier's boss, Bennett Raley, was confirmed as Assistant Secretary of Interior for Water and Science without a dissenting vote by the US senate. But he shouldn't have been. A Colorado water lawyer who has tangled with Raley many times provided CounterPunch with this profile of the man who will be directing federal water policy: "Raley is a thorough ideologue - and is an intense Republican insider - more of a philosophical protégé of Watt than Norton. He's a sharp knife assassin kind of guy and a complete private property rights person, as evidenced by his testimony at the State Capitol in favor of limiting liability to private property interests, his disdain regarding Federal prerogatives, his ardent support of state's preference over federal estate authority. He's also proved to be a devious opponent to federal review of local and state actions. His weak point is that he might be an intellectual weakling, stuck on conservative 'themes' from that ideological point of view. He's the Colorado Water Congress darling - and is greatly in support of the expenditure of public monies for water development and for those who gain from that process. It's sad to have him in any policy position - be it state or national. From his past repeated objections to federal authority, it's hard to envision him now as a captain of the federal force."

SEE YOU IN SEPTEMBER

CounterPunch doesn't publish in August. We hope all you CounterPunchers are having a great summer. Look for your next issue soon after Labor Day. For those of you able to negotiate the Web, we will be updating our web page with new material every few days. CounterPunch never sleeps.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

(**Snow Hill** *continued from page 1*

resentative in the Congress since Reconstruction, and as Alberta Lee, Edward's daughter, put it: "We have Mr Mitchell to thank for doing away with Jim Crow in railway trains. He was forced to leave a Pullman car because of this race. The suit went up to the US Supreme Court. And he won his case." Martin Luther King's speech teacher, Sarah Grace Bradley, got her start as an instructor at Snow Hill.

At 56, under the fearful strain of keeping Snow Hill going, Edwards lost his mind in 1925. Friends found him in a cheap hotel in Jackson, Mississippi, fighting the air with a stick and throwing money in the fire. He recovered, retired and lived another quarter century but the fire was gone. By the time it was closed in 1973, the Snow Hill Institute, now run by the state of Alabama, was in poor shape.

About 50 miles south-west of Montgomery a sign on route 28, announced Snow Hill, of which there was no other visible trace. I asked an old black man where the Institute was and he told me the next blacktop side road on the right. Soon enough, a mile later, I could see a group of big red-brick buildings, a venerable school bell but no one around. Higher along the little ridge there were handsome old frame houses, all deserted. A trailer with a radio at mid-volume. Knocks produced nothing and feeling a little like the first to board a ghost ship I went back down the lane, saw a smaller school building and opened the door to find Consuela Lee, Edwards' granddaughter, calmly waiting.

Our friend Pierre Sprey told me about Consuela last year. He'd just finished recording a session with her for his Mapleshade label in his Maryland studio, east of Washington. Pierre was ecstatic about Consuela's playing: "Though different in style, she comes out of a very interesting tradition of classically-trained black pianists, like Dorothy Donegan, Mary Lou Williams or Shirley Horn, who early in life decided they loved jazz but continued to become classically disciplined pianists. Nat King Cole was another, and in a lot of ways she's a modern evolution of Nat King Cole who was an astonishing virtuoso, way beyond Oscar Peterson, though more modest about it."

Pierre mentioned Snow Hill and the summer arts sessions Consuela has been running there, her operettas from Uncle Remus stories, her steely will, her talented musical family including her brother the bassist Bill Lee, father of Spike. He sent me the newly released CD a few weeks ago, and I loved its spirit, its subtleties, its discipline. (To get hold of it, call 1-888-CDMAPLE, or visit www.mapleshaderecords.com.)

It didn't cross my mind until she'd thrown enough dates into her life story for me to figure it out, that Consuela Lee is set to be 75 in November; nor did I think her slight, though she's probably around 5' 2" and she remarked to me the next morning, with a 60 lb Doberman called Garvey (follow on from another Doberman, Toussaint) sitting in her lap, that her two children worry about her weighing 110 pounds. There's so much fire and focus in the woman that such vital statistics aren't vital at all.

Though the food was good at a place in Camden, the next town west, Consuela said, the owner was a racist who'd recently refused to serve her and a friend. We should go to Selma. Off she went to one of the big frame houses on the Hill to make ready and handed me a package she'd prepared. In a couple of pages I was in the midst of Consuela's onslaughts on the board of trustees of the Snow Hill Institute.

When he was lying by the roadside, stricken with scrofula, young Edwards would often see Roscoe Simpson, the owner of the Snow Hill plantation, riding by and Simpson would toss him a coin. Then, when Edwards returned from Tuskegee he went to see Simpson, who strongly supported the plan for a school, gave him first seven acres, then 33 then 60 more, an overall gift of 100 acres. Some $30,000 of the money Edwards raised up north later bought half of Simpson's plantation, an overall holding of some 1950 acres. In his memoir Edwards said this allowed "black people still living in the slave quarters to own their homes and small farms". He was unstinting about Simpson as "one of the noblest men I have ever met, North or South.... at least fifty years ahead of his time....Without Mr R.O. Simpson there could not have been any Snow Hill Institute."

After a career teaching music Consuela got back to Snow Hill in 1979 to try and get Snow Hill on its feet again. She's been at loggerheads with Snow Hill Institute's trustees ever since, whose black members, she charges, "fulfill the roles of: 1) 'window dressing' in compliance with the look of integration, and 2) protectors of white interests", with said white interest "lining its pockets with money on behalf of big national timber companies who have made huge profits from Snow Hill Institute's timber for years at the expense of the community, and the detriment of the children."

"Rap? They call it music, but if anything it's poetry, and dance. No melody. Singing is part of our legacy. Had we not been able to sing I just don't know if we would have survived or not."

On the face of it, Simpson and those Northern liberals who supported Edwards could, if they were still living, probably gripe that the the Institute does not seem to be conspicuously exerting itself these days to fulfill Edwards' dream of educating black children. Similarly, the state of Alabama, which holds the ten acres on which the main school buildings stand, isn't doing anything either. According to Victor Inge, a Selma writer who last year wrote and published "From the Ground Up", a good book about Edwards, Wilcox county ranks bottom of Alabama's 67 in the usual stats concerning children, education and unemployment.

The public school system in the county is overwhelmingly black and scandalously underfunded. At one school, according to Inge, all but one student qualify for free or reduced lunches. As for

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Edwards started the Snow Hill Institute in the mid-1890s in a one-room cabin with one teacher, three students and 50 cents in capital.

Edwards' vision of independent black farmers, in 1900 68 per cent of Alabamians worked in farm-related jobs. These days, in tune with the national destruction of small farms down the decades, about 2 per cent work in agriculture. For years, as a lawsuit successfully proved in 1999, the USDA has been discriminating against black farmers.

As I told her, Consuela's driving is like her piano playing, spirited yet disciplined. We shot along the narrow roads, across the Edmund Pettus bridge where whites ambushed the civil rights marchers in 1965 and into Selma. Consuela described how her grandmother, at her wit's ends about Edwards' collapse, had finally taken him to a local woman who practised voodoo. Inside the dark little hovel the woman talked to Edwards in her kitchen for a while, told Susie Edwards she could help and gave her a bottle of "stuff" with instructions how to administer it. Edwards recovered, and Consuela remembers him for her first twenty years, a muted figure smoking his pipe and reading the New York Herald Tribune on the porch of one of the big frame houses.

Everyone was musical in Consuela's family: from her father, an electrical engineer (cornet), her mother (piano), Consuela (piano) sister Grace (singing), brothers Bill (bass, "the musical genius of the family, though he's hard to get along with"), Leonard (sax), Clifton (trumpet), Clarence (trombone). Bill organized a successful family group, "The Descendants of Mike and Phoebe" that played around the country, including one Newport Jazz festival: "The hippies pulled the strings out of the piano. Tore it up. That was in '74 or '75. Why did they tear it up? I just don't was during those times."

Commencing her autobiographical sketch with the words "I was brought up like a princess" Consuela briskly marched me through her life, from music at Fisk in Nashville, a spell teaching in a private college near Ocala, Florida, where she met the man, Isaac Thomas Moorhead, she was to marry in 1950, then divorce 41 years later, He was the basketball coach on a visiting team and his assigned role in her life narrative these days is not flattering. "Coaching, recruiting, playing around" is Consuela's pithy resume of men in her husband's line of work, though she does give him a credit for their two fine children.

They were in New York in the early 1950s when bebop ruled and she could hear Art Tatum, Charlie Parker, Bud Powell along with friends like Mary Lou Williams. She applied to the University of Alabama to do her masters and the school acknowledged her talent, adding that it couldn't accept her and would pay for her to go to any school outside the state. She ended up at Northwestern ("though don't think that was any bed of roses").

The late 1970s found her playing three nights a week at a hotel in Williamsburg and then she visited Snow Hill on a visit to her mother: "I came onto the campus and the weeds were knee high. Devastating. I went into the vocational building where the boys learned farming. The back door was open. I went in and there were bales of hay. They were using it as a barn." She resolved to get Snow Hill back on its feet and began to spend more and more of her time there, starting her own Spring Tree/Snow Hill Institute for the Performing Arts. In 1993 Consuela was rebuffed in Wilcox County Court for her charges that the trustees were endangering Snow Hill Institute by selling property. Relations with the board are acrid. After reading through the judgement later that night I fell asleep on a nice big bed under the high ceiling fan in Consuela's front room.

Ghosts are supposed to haunt the night. I felt them in the dawn, one of the most beautiful I've ever seen, as I sat on Consuela's porch looking through huge trees, listening to the birds. Down to the left was the old spring where the slaves used to haul water to their shacks. Along to the right was Edwards' house, books in his library just the way he left them. Next door one of her brothers, a diabetic, is tended by Minnie, a local woman who later that morning sang a spell-binding spiritual, plus some of the devil's music, a blues. The feel of history was heavy, though not oppressive.

Consuela came out with Garvey the Doberman and we talked as the sun began to climb. I asked her why one lovely piece on her CD, a composition of her own, was called "Prince of Piano – Alfonso Seville".

"When I got to Fisk, and this was the odd thing about black colleges, they didn't want us to play jazz, which they thought quite a cut below Bach, Beethoven and Chopin and the boys. They wanted us to concentrate on the Europeans. Of course we'd play jazz anyway. One day I went into the music building, 18 at the time and there was this guy was sitting there, playing like Tatum. I just stood there looking at him, He asked me my name and said "are you a music student? Aha, do you play jazz?" "No, but I'm trying." He was a medical student at Meharry, a black medical school in Nashville. We introduced ouselves and from then on it was Alfonso Seville. The heck with Beethoven. I got a C in piano My report came home, my mother said

SUBSCRIPTION INFO

Enter/Renew Subscription here:

One year individual, $40
($35 email only / $45 email/print)
One year institution/supporters $100
One year student/low income, $30
T-shirts, $17
Please send back issue(s)
_____ ($5/issue)

Name _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

Payment must accompany order, or just dial 1-800-840-3683 and renew by credit card. Add $17.50 for foreign subscriptions. If you want CounterPunch emailed to you please supply your email address. Make checks payable to: **CounterPunch.**
Business Office
PO Box 228, Petrolia, CA 95558

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Consuela, a C in piano?" That's all she said. She's a very gentle person.

"I can't say enough about Alfonso Seville's influence on me as a pianist. He had huge hands, Usually you can reach a tenth, he could reach an eleventh. I can reach a tenth, I really had to work to do that, to get sounds that he was doing. I had to do tenths with one and fourths with the other. He became a doctor and he died young."

"Did he record?"

"Let me tell you, after I got word he'd passed I called his wife, I said 'Listen I'd really like the tapes.''Oh I don't have any.' 'You don't have a tape of your husband, who was the greatest pianist that ever lived?' I was so mad at that woman."

"Rap? They call it music, but if anything it's poetry, and dance. No melody. Singing is part of our legacy. Had we not been able to sing I just don't know if we would have survived or not. Not only do we sing, but we tend to improvise as we sing and it's such part of our history. Since rap came in in thre late 70s I'm finding our children aren't singing. I decided to organize a mass choir of the children of all the elementary schools in this county. In auditioning I had to teach them to listen for the tone before they tried to sing it. For me that's so elementary, but these children did not have music, so who's to blame? They sing in church. But the churches.... Sometimes the musicians are not quite up to par. They play electronic instruments, turned up too high. If you've got to outsing a bass guitar and an electronic piano, and a drummer, it begins to be just hollering, and it's not music."

"Down the road here is your grandpa's grave? Snow Hill must have educated a bunch of local Wilcox county people, but the effect has been lost?"

I felt a little bad about asking, essentially, whether her grandfather's legacy had been whittled down to zero, but Consuela answered quick enough.

"Yes, the effect has been lost. Right now we're at a stage we can go anywhere we want, we can eat where we want, sit where we want, I'm saying that to say something else: We've lost something; Because we were a black community that was sealed in by segregation, we had our own businesses. We had our own restaurants, beauty parlors. We were self-contained. But now we have very few entrepreneurs, especially in the south and even more especially in the rural south. We're very dependent on whites. We owe the banks too much. We owe the credit cards too much, so we're not in full control. Even the churches.

"Thank god, because of my grandfather we never had to sharecrop. But I do know the demeaning, debasing, horrible things we went through in that segregation era. You don't forget. People say you should be thankful, you should forget. But you don't forget it. So it wasn't easy, but we were all lumped together. On a train, we were in a car, there were just blacks. That meant you got the doctors, lawyers, sharecroppers, the women, all of us, all of us there. So we had a cameraderie that's definitely missing now.

"My mother was not religious, though she was very spiritual. My grandmother took us to church and thank god she did, because we heard those spirituals. I don't go to churches, because I'm not getting anything. The ministers come in here, from Selma or Montgomery and they come and they'll preach their sermons and they're gone. Hey, a minister is supposed to be working in the community. So I stay right here. I have my church right here in this house. I go in there and practise.I try to get in two to three hours a day, usually morning. After I walk the dog. Generally 6.30 to 8.30. I'm playing better than I ever played in my life."

Consuela described how her grandmother, at her wit's ends about Edwards' collapse, had finally taken him to a local woman who practised voodoo.

Older folks often say such things and they're not always to be believed, but I believed Consuela. She has the fire her grandpa lost. I said goodbye and after a wonderful plate of soul food (baked pork chops and collard greens) in Camden, headed off down the road to Mobile. **CP**

CounterPunch
3220 N Street, NW, PMB 346
Washington, DC 20007-2829

Attention Subscribers: the number that appears above your name on the mailing label refers to the ISSUE NUMBER AND YEAR of CounterPunch after which your subscription expires. For example ,14 01 stands for the 14th issue of 2001, ie, July 16-31.

Why George Bush Lost the Hispanic Vote

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED